

3.14 SPECIAL DESIGNATIONS

3.14.1 Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)

3.14.1.1 Regional Overview

3.14.1.1.1 Currently Designated ACECs

The VFO manages seven ACECs (165,944 total acres) that were designated in 1994 in the record of decision (ROD) for the Diamond Mountain RMP (BLM 1994). They are, in order of decreasing size, Browns Park, Nine Mile Canyon, Red Mountain-Dry Fork, Red Creek Watershed, Pariette Wetlands, Lower Green River Corridor, and Lears Canyon. Existing ACECs are subject to reconsideration when RMPs are revised. Based on a current analysis of the areas, the present designations have been effective in protecting the relevant values they exhibit, and these will all be carried forward as ACECs in the Vernal RMP.

Table 3.14.1 provides a summary of the relevance and importance criteria for each currently designated ACEC. The management prescriptions for these areas are detailed in Chapter 3 of Diamond Mountain RMP and ROD (BLM 1994).

TABLE 3.14.1. RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE CRITERIA OF CURRENTLY DESIGNATED ACECS	
Relevance	Importance
<p>Browns Park (52,721 acres) Significant diversity and density of cultural and historical sites, a nationally recognized Class I fishery; has special status plant and animal species habitat, cultural values, crucial deer winter habitat, high quality scenic values.</p>	<p>Has qualities that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, unique, endangered, and threatened.</p>
<p>Nine Mile Canyon (44,181 acres) Nationally significant Fremont, Ute, and Archaic rock art and structures; regionally significant populations of special status plant species, and high quality scenery.</p>	<p>Has more than locally significant qualities, which give it special worth, and distinctiveness.</p>
<p>Red Mountain-Dry Fork (24,285 acres) Significant diversity and density of cultural sites, quality paleontological finds, and two relic vegetation communities.</p>	<p>Has qualities that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, unique and distinctive.</p>
<p>Red Creek Watershed (24,475 acres) Regionally significant critical watershed; part of Green River drainage system and its Class I fishery values.</p>	<p>Has more than locally significant qualities, which give it special worth, and distinctiveness.</p>
<p>Pariette Wetlands (10,437 acres) Special status bird and plant species habitat, a wetlands ecosystem, significant population of the federally threatened plant species <i>Sclerocactus glaucus</i>.</p>	<p>Has qualities that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, unique, endangered, and threatened.</p>
<p>Lower Green River (8,470 acres – lower) Riparian habitat, special status animal species habitat, and high-quality scenic values.</p>	<p>Has more than locally significant qualities, which give it special worth, and distinctiveness.</p>

TABLE 3.14.1. RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE CRITERIA OF CURRENTLY DESIGNATED ACECS	
Relevance	Importance
<p>Lears Canyon (1,375 acres) Contains a natural system, specifically relict plant and plant communities, serves as a scientific reference area</p>	<p>Has qualities that make it fragile, sensitive, rare, irreplaceable, unique, endangered, and threatened. Has been recognized as warranting protection in order to carry out the mandates of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.</p>

3.14.2 Potential ACECs

The eight potential ACECs and the expansion of two existing ACECs being considered for possible ACEC designation through this planning process are discussed below. Only those nominated areas determined to meet specific relevance and importance criteria are identified as potential ACECs. The following descriptions generally define the maximum acreage proposed in the alternatives although in some instances variations in the size and location of the proposed ACECs are described for clarification. See Table 4.14.1 in Chapter Four for a description of the various acreage proposals, Figures 22-24 for geographic locations, and Appendix G for more information on ACEC evaluations.

3.14.2.1 Coyote Basin ACEC

This ACEC is proposed as two different polygons, 87,743 and 47,659 acres respectively. The 47,659-acre polygon is based on the current reintroduction area of the black-footed ferret and is known as the Primary Management Zone (PMZ). The 87,743-acre polygon includes most of the PMZ in addition to several thousand acres to the north and west suggested by the DWR as additional reintroduction areas for the black-footed ferret. The Coyote Basin-Coyote Basin sub-complex is also inclusive of this area. (See Coyote Basin Complex listed below.)

This area contains essential habitat for maintaining species diversity and includes one of the largest populations of white-tailed prairie dogs. The white-tailed prairie dog is essential to the survival of the endangered black-footed ferret in this area.

The VFO and the Vernal Branch of Utah State University are conducting a cooperative research project relating to the species recovery of black-footed ferrets. Black-footed ferrets are being raised in captivity for reintroduction back into the wild. Reintroduction sites are in Utah’s Coyote Basin, as well as sites in Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and South Dakota. The local research is focused on identifying the disease transmitting flea species found on white-tailed prairie dogs in Coyote Basin.

The potential Coyote Basin ACEC also provides crucial habitat for pronghorn, as well as for several special status species, including the ferruginous hawk, peregrine falcon, sage grouse, long-billed curlew, grasshopper sparrow, short-eared owl, big free-tailed bat, black-footed ferret, and ringtail cat.

3.14.2.2 Coyote Basin Complex ACEC

This 124,161-acre complex consists of five sub-complexes. They are Coyote Basin-Coyote Basin (26,590 acres), Coyote Basin-Snake John (28,274 acres), Coyote Basin-Kennedy Wash (10,670 acres), Coyote Basin-Myton Bench (36,670 acres), and Coyote Basin-Shiner (21,957 acres).

The Coyote Basin-Coyote Basin sub-complex is located along the Colorado-Utah border, trending northeast from Bonanza and includes Coyote Wash. State Highway 45 and State Road 64 bound the area on the west and east, respectively. Directly west and to the north, adjoining the Coyote Basin-Coyote Basin sub-complex is the Coyote Basin-Kennedy Wash sub-complex that includes Kennedy Wash. The Coyote-Basin-Snake John sub-complex also borders Colorado, is bisected by Highway 40 in a northwest direction, with Cliff Ridge as a northern boundary. The Coyote Basin-Shiner sub-complex is located north and to the west of Dinosaur National Monument with the western boundary ending close to Jones Hole Road. The Coyote Basin-Myton Bench sub-complex is located west and to the north of the Pariette Wetlands.

The complex has been proposed by the Center for Native Ecosystems for protection of the white-tailed prairie dog. The relevance and importance criteria are the same as the Coyote Basin ACEC proposal listed above.

3.14.2.3 Bitter Creek ACEC

The 68,834-acre potential Bitter Creek ACEC is also located north of the Book Cliff divide with the eastern boundary on the Colorado border and the western boundary following McCook Ridge. The proposed ACEC includes McCook Ridge, Augusi Canyon, Dry Burn Canyon, Rat Hole Ridge, and the headwaters of Bitter Creek.

This area provides critical habitat for several state and federal special status species. It also home to one of the largest black bear populations in Utah.

Within the potential ACEC is possible habitat for the reintroduction of the native Colorado cutthroat trout. This area has an extensive desert wetland and several springs. In addition to the wide variety of flora and fauna, the proposed ACEC includes pictograph and petroglyph panels and several historical cabins.

In addition, a small pocket of old trees (approximately five individuals; each over 500 years old), is found on a southeasterly exposure of scattered Douglas fir, pinyon, and Rocky Mountain juniper. Located at 7,720 feet in elevation and at T13S R25E Sec 35, SESE (separate $\frac{1}{4}$ sections), the trees are situated near the head of West Tent Canyon, just east of Moonshine Ridge. Of particular interest in this group of old growth pinyon, is a particularly old and large pinyon found in the early 1990s by a VFO forester while cruising bug-killed Douglas fir. This large pinyon is now officially listed as the state's largest tree through the Utah Community Forest Council. Having a circumference of 138 inches at diameter base height, 41 feet in height and a crown spread of 39 feet; the tree was officially designated on January 9th 1995 (Utah Register of Big Trees January 1995). The tree was also increment bored at the time of dimension measurements. Although the bore sample was only a partial diameter, it was determined through extrapolation that this tree was well over 1000 years old, possibly as old as 1,476 years. Previously, the oldest living pinyon in the United States was 973 years old in 1965 and was located on an exceptionally dry site in Colorado (USFS Handbook No. 271 page 401). Therefore, this tree is most likely the oldest living pinyon.

3.14.2.4 Bitter Creek-P.R. Springs ACEC

The 147,425-acre potential Bitter Creek-P.R. Springs ACEC is also located north of the Book Cliff Divide in eastern Utah and includes the Bitter Creek ACEC with the McCook Ridge as the shared border. The proposed Main Canyon ACEC borders the west side. This ACEC includes the all the features of the Bitter Creek ACEC in addition to Sweetwater Canyon, Tom Patterson Canyon, P.R. Canyon, Railroad Canyon, and the Book Cliffs Mountain Browse ISA. The relevance and importance criteria are the same as Bitter Creek.

3.14.2.5 Middle Green ACEC

The Middle Green River ACEC would include 6,768 acres line of sight from the centerline of the river up to one-half mile along both sides of the Middle Green River between Dinosaur National Monument and the boundary of the Ouray National Wildlife Refuge.

The river provides habitat for numerous plant and animal species. The river corridor is also a key location for prehistoric and historical cultural sites.

The area also offers critical habitat for several special status species including the bald eagle, long-billed curlew, black tern, mountain plover, Caspian tern, American White Pelican, common yellow throat, osprey, ferruginous hawk, peregrine falcon, grasshopper sparrow, Lewis' woodpecker, short-eared owl, black-footed ferret, Townsend's big-eared bat, Utah milk snake, Colorado pikeminnow, roundtail chub, razorback sucker, and the Uinta Basin hookless cactus.

This river corridor is a destination for recreational activities such as canoeing, rafting, fishing, hiking, camping, picnicking, and sightseeing.

3.14.2.6 White River ACEC

This 47,130-acre potential White River ACEC is located approximately 45 miles south of Vernal in northeastern Utah. As a tributary to the Green River, the White enters Uintah County approximately 23 river miles downstream from Rangely, Colorado. It joins with the Green River approximately 2 miles south of Ouray, Utah, for a total Utah river segment of 44 river miles. The portion of concern to the BLM as a river corridor is the portion from the Utah-Colorado state line to the boundary with the Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation upstream from the Mountain Fuel Bridge.

The White River provides critical habitat for the endangered Colorado pikeminnow. Other threatened, endangered, and sensitive species in the river corridor include the flannel mouth sucker, roundtail chub, razorback sucker, yellow-billed cuckoo, peregrine falcon, and bald eagle.

This area provides unique scenery displaying incredible diversity in landscape features. The steeply sloped canyon walls rise upward 800 feet above the river floor. Juniper, rice grass, black sagebrush, needle and thread, and shadscale dot the barren slopes.

This river corridor is attracting increasing numbers of visitors from many states and countries for canoeing, rafting, fishing, hiking, camping, picnicking, and sightseeing.

3.14.2.7 Four Mile Wash ACEC

The 50,280 acre potential Four Mile Wash Outstanding Natural Area/ACEC is located on the east side and west side of the Green River. This area has high value scenery, a riparian ecosystem, and habitat for special status fish.

This canyon has an important riparian ecosystem that supports a diversity of wildlife species. Critical habitat for four endangered fish is located within this potential ACEC: Colorado pikeminnow (*Ptychocheilus lucius*), Bonytail (*Gila elegans*), Humpbacked chub (*Gila cypha*), and the Razorback sucker (*Xyrauchen texanus*).

3.14.2.8 Main Canyon ACEC

Main Canyon is located on the East Tavaputs Plateau in the southeast corner of Uintah County. It is an area comprising 100,915 acres and is a tributary to Willow Creek. The area has important cultural resources and natural systems.

This potential ACEC has numerous sites associated with the historical Northern Ute migration route along Main Canyon. In addition, there is a recently discovered historical inscription dating to the early French fur trade area. This outstanding example of natural processes is part of a larger area first proposed as a Book Cliffs National Conservation Area, and later part of a 1998 cooperative project of the BLM and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) known as the Book Cliffs Conservation Initiative. Most of the potential ACEC is currently within the Winter Ridge Wilderness Study Area (WSA).

3.14.2.9 Nine Mile Canyon Expansion ACEC

This 36,987-acre potential Nine Mile Canyon Expansion ACEC is located in the southwest corner of the VPA. The area runs along Nine Mile Creek to the edges of the canyon. Part of this area is within the Price BLM Resource Management Area and would be covered in the Price BLM RMP. This area contains the same relevant and important values as in the currently designated Nine Mile Canyon ACEC: significant cultural resources, special status plant species, and high quality scenery.

3.14.2.10 Lower Green River Expansion ACEC

This 1700 acre potential Lower Green River Expansion ACEC includes the current Lower Green River ACEC and is being proposed to include the eastern shoreline. Relevance and importance values are the same as the existing Lower Green River ACEC.

3.14.3 Wild and Scenic Rivers

3.14.3.1 Regional Overview

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act established a National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (NWSRS) to protect and preserve designated rivers throughout the nation in their free-flowing condition, as well as their immediate environments. It contains policy for managing designated rivers and created processes for designating additional rivers into the NWSRS. Section 5(d) of the Act directs federal agencies to consider the potential for national wild, scenic, and recreational river areas in all planning, for the use and development of water and related land resources. Wild and scenic river considerations are being made in the Vernal RMP revision.

To determine eligibility, the VFO inventoried all potentially eligible rivers. All rivers nominated during scoping or that appeared on national river lists were automatically considered. In addition, all rivers within the VPA were mapped and reviewed by agency and non-agency subject matter specialists and members of the interested public to identify any additional rivers that could be potentially eligible.

All rivers determined to be eligible for congressional designation into the NWSRS are considered further for suitability in the planning process. Those determined suitable for congressional designation into the NWSRS are recommended to Congress for such designation.

The Upper Green and Lower Green segments of the Green River were found suitable for congressional designation in the ROD for the Diamond Mountain RMP, and are currently managed to protect their free-flowing nature, outstandingly remarkable values, and tentative classifications.

3.14.3.2 River Segments Determined Eligible for Wild and Scenic River Designation

Of the 89 streams segments identified by the VFO as potentially eligible and inventoried, 11 segments involving approximately 112 BLM shoreline miles and 216 total river miles were determined to be eligible for Congressional designation into the NWSRS (Table 3.14.2). Appendix C provides additional information regarding the eligibility review. It is BLM policy (8351 Manual, Section .32C) to manage eligible segments to protect their free-flowing nature, outstandingly remarkable values, and tentative classifications to the extent that BLM has the authority to do so. Until the ROD for the Vernal RMP is signed, such protection involves case-by-case review and mitigation of any actions proposed that might affect the eligible river. Protective management will continue for any segments determined suitable in the ROD for the Vernal RMP. For each suitable river, the ROD will identify specific management conditions that are in keeping with a suitability decision. Management that would apply, should any rivers be designated by Congress, is identified in BLM’s 8351 Manual, Section .51.

Segment Name	Segment Description	Outstandingly Remarkable Values	Tentative Classification	BLM Shoreline Miles	Total Miles
Argyle Creek	Headwaters to Carbon County line	Scenic	Recreational	4.0	22.0
Bitter Creek	Utah state line to where it enters private property	Fish, Wildlife/habitat, Cultural, Historic, Recreational	Scenic	7.0	22.0
Evacuation Creek	Utah state line to confluence with White River	Historic	Recreational	7.0	21.0
Lower Green River	Between public land boundary south of Ouray and the Carbon County line	Recreational, Fish	Scenic	27.0	30.0
Middle Green River	Between Dinosaur National Monument and the public land boundary north or Ouray	Fish	Recreational	20.0	36.0

TABLE 3.14.2. SUMMARY INFORMATION FOR ELIGIBLE RIVERS IN THE VPA

Segment Name	Segment Description	Outstandingly Remarkable Values	Tentative Classification	BLM Shoreline Miles	Total Miles
Nine Mile Creek (A)	The segment within Duchesne County between the Carbon County line and the confluence with Gate Canyon	Scenic, Cultural	Recreational	7.0	13.0
Nine Mile Creek (B)	The segment within Duchesne County between Gate Canyon and the Green River	Scenic, Cultural	Scenic	0.0	6.0
Upper Green River	Between Little Hole and Utah state line	Scenic, Recreational, Fish, Wildlife/habitat, Cultural	Scenic	12.0	22.0
White River (A)	The segment between the Colorado state line and its confluence with Asphalt Wash	Scenic, Fish, Wildlife/habitat Recreational, Historic	Scenic	8.0	24.0
White River (B)	The segment between Asphalt Wash to where the river leaves Section 18, T10S. R23 E. SLBM	Scenic, Fish, Wildlife/habitat Recreational, Historic	Wild	10.0	10.0
White River (C)	The segment from where the river leaves Section 18, T10S. R23 E. SLBM to the Indian Trust Land boundary	Scenic, Fish, Wildlife/habitat Recreational, Historic	Scenic	10.0	10.0

Note: River mileage is approximate.

3.14.4 Wilderness Study Areas

3.14.4.1 Overview

In 1964, Congress passed the Wilderness Act, establishing a national system of lands for the purpose of preserving a representative sample of ecosystems in their natural condition for benefit of future generations. The Forest Service, National Park Service, and Fish and Wildlife Service managed most of the land designated as wilderness prior to 1976. With the passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) in 1976, Congress directed the BLM to

inventory, study, and recommend which public lands under its administration should be designated wilderness.

In 1979, the BLM began a wilderness inventory of 22 million acres of public land in Utah. By 1985, the BLM established 95 wilderness study areas (WSAs), totaling about 3.3 million acres, which have wilderness character. For the next several years, these areas were studied to determine which would be recommended to Congress for designation as wilderness. In October 1991, the Secretary of the Interior recommended that Congress designate 69 areas, totaling about 2 million acres as wilderness. To date, with few exceptions, Congress has not acted on that recommendation.

There is no designated wilderness on public lands in the VFO.

3.14.4.2 Planning Area Profile

WSAs are roadless, natural, provide outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, and may have supplemental values (such as ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value).

There are six WSAs in the VFO (Figure 23). The WSAs, designated and protected under the authority of Section 603 of FLPMA, are managed according to the *Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands under Wilderness Review* (IMP, BLM Manual Handbook H-8550-1), to preserve their wilderness values until Congress either designates them wilderness or releases them for other uses. Only Congress can designate a WSA as wilderness or release it from the protective mandate of FLPMA. The status of WSAs will not change as a result of this resource management planning process. The RMP, however, will prescribe how the WSAs would be managed if released by Congress.

TABLE 3.14.3. WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS	
Name	Acreage
Book Cliffs Mountain Browse ISA	400 acres
Bull Canyon	520 acres
Daniels Canyon	2,496 acres
Diamond Breaks	3,900 acres
West Cold Springs	3,200 acres
Winter Ridge	42,462 acres
Total: 6 areas	52,978 acres

3.14.5 Non-WSA Lands with or Likely to Have Wilderness Characteristics

3.14.5.1 Overview

Since the WSAs were established in 1980s Utah wilderness allocations and decisions have become a national issue. For more than 20 years, the public has debated which lands have wilderness characteristics and should be considered by Congress for wilderness designation. Because of the debate (and a significant passage of time since the BLM’s original inventories), in 1996 the Secretary of the Interior directed the BLM to take another look at some of the lands in

question. In response to the Secretary’s direction, the BLM inventoried these lands and found approximately another 2.6 million acres of public land statewide—in addition to existing WSAs—to have wilderness characteristics (Utah Wilderness Inventory 1999). Refer to wilderness characteristics in the glossary.

In April 2003, the U.S. District Court, District of Utah, Central District approved an memorandum of agreement negotiated to settle a lawsuit originally brought in 1996 by the State of Utah, Utah SITLA, and the Utah Association of Counties, challenging the BLM’s authority to conduct new wilderness inventories. The settlement stipulated that the BLM’s authority to designate new WSAs expired no later than October 21, 1993. The BLM, however, does have the authority to conduct inventories for characteristics associated with the concept of wilderness -and to consider management of these values in its land-use planning process. IM 2003-275-Change 1 identifies wilderness characteristics that may be considered in land use planning as naturalness and outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation-refer to Wilderness Characteristics in the glossary.

3.14.5.2 Planning Area Profile

There are nine areas in the VPA (approximately 110,381 acres), outside of existing WSAs, that were determined by BLM in the 1999 inventory to have the wilderness characteristics of naturalness and outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation (Table 3.14.4; Figure 20).

TABLE 3.14.4. NON-WSA LANDS WITH WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS	
Name	Acreage
Bull Canyon	2,470 acres
Cold Spring Mountain	9,430 acres
Cripple Cowboy	13,592 acres ¹
Daniels Canyon	3,045 acres
Desolation Canyon	58,984 acres ²
Diamond Breaks	4,560 acres
Moonshine Draw	3,837 acres
White River	13,609 acres
Wild Mountain	965 acres
Total: 9 areas	110,492 acres
¹ Includes 1,028 acres in the Moab Field Office. ² Portions of the Desolation Canyon area with wilderness characteristic are located in the Vernal, Price, and Moab Field Offices. This figure is the acreage of the area in the Vernal Field Office. The total acreage of the area with wilderness characteristics is 154,859 acres.	

During scoping for this land use plan the public proposed that another 16 areas have wilderness characteristics and should be managed to preserve those values. A BLM interdisciplinary team evaluated this and other information and determined that all or portions of 11 areas, totaling

approximately 166,704 acres, are likely to have wilderness characteristics including naturalness and outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation (Table 3.14.5; see Figure 20).

TABLE 3.14.5. NON-WSA LANDS LIKELY TO HAVE WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS	
Name	Acreages
Bitter Creek	32,961 acres
Bitter Creek/Rat Hole Ridge	11,150 acres
Bourdette Draw	15,460 acres
Desolation Canyon	11,330 acres
Diamond Mountain	26,645 acres
Hells Hole Canyon	2,370 acres
Lower Bitter Creek	11,540 acres
Lower Flaming Gorge	17,830 acres
Moonshine Draw	1,828 acres
Red Creek Badlands	1,600 acres
Sweet Water Canyon	7,030 acres
White River	10,590 acres
Wolf Point	14,570 acres
Total: 11 Areas	164,904 acres